Journal of the Short Story in English
Les Cahiers de la nouvelle

50 | Spring 2008
Special issue: Virginia Woolf

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Laura Marcus

Édition électronique
URL : http://journals.openedition.org/jsse/702
ISSN : 1969-6108

Éditeur
Presses universitaires d'Angers

Édition imprimée
Date de publication : 1 juin 2008
ISSN : 0294-04442

Référence électronique
Laura Marcus, « "In the Circle of the Lens": Woolf's "Telescope" Story, Scene-making and Memory », *Journal of the Short Story in English* [En ligne], 50 | Spring 2008, mis en ligne le 01 juin 2011, consulté le 20 avril 2019. URL : http://journals.openedition.org/jsse/702

"In the Circle of the Lens": Woolf's "Telescope" Story, Scene-making and Memory

Laura Marcus

1 Virginia Woolf noted in her diary for 31st January 1939: "I wrote the old Henry Taylor telescope story that has been humming in my head these 10 years" (Woolf 1984: 204). The short story to which she was referring was published as "The Searchlight", in the posthumous *A Haunted House and Other Stories.*The "humming" had, however, already been transferred to the page ten years previously, when Woolf wrote a story which she entitled "What the Telescope Discovered", followed a year later by the incomplete "Incongruous/ Inaccurate Memories". In all, Woolf produced some fourteen different drafts of "the telescope story", with fragments of other drafts. A number of the later draft versions set the scene at Freshwater on the Isle of Wight, where Woolf's great-aunt Julia Margaret Cameron, a pioneer photographer, and her close neighbour and friend the Poet Laureate Alfred Tennyson were living in the mid-nineteenth century.

2 While some of the drafts of Woolf's "telescope story" are dated, others are not, leading to uncertainties about the chronology of the story's composition. J.W. Graham, in an article published in 1976 which was the first to look in detail at the variant drafts, took the published version, "The Searchlight", as the culminating narrative for Woolf (Graham 1976). He noted the date of the first of the "Searchlight drafts" as January 31st 1939 (the date Woolf gives in her diary), but records three subsequent, though undated, typescripts. The last of these was, he argued, clearly the work of a professional typist and hence a "final" version. His argument was that

> [Woolf] began to draft the story in what was to prove its final form, then abandoned it for the very different Freshwater version, and then decided to return to the version drafted some two years earlier. Whatever her reasons for inventing the Freshwater version, the fact that she abandoned it is more pertinent to the present discussion, because it suggests that finally, after at least six drafts, she found this form of the story fundamentally inadequate. (Graham 1976: 385)

3 In a more recent article, Jane de Gay has queried Graham's chronology, noting that the version of "The Searchlight" published by Susan Dick in *Virginia Woolf: The Complete Short Fiction* came to light after Graham had published his article, and its professional typing can be dated as no later than September 1940. The Freshwater story was begun in 1941, after Woolf had, bar very minor revisions, completed the draft subsequently published as "The Searchlight". De Gay suggests that "the Freshwater story of 1941 had its own momentum, and that with its different framing narrative and title, it was developing away from the Ivimey version and the searchlight motif" (de Gay 2000: 209). For de Gay, the composition of the Freshwater story was driven by Woolf's interests in Julia Margaret Cameron, Victorian photography and the writing of a non-patriarchal history. In this reading, the photograph replaces the searchlight and the telescope to become the story's central motif.

4 Whereas J.W. Graham sought to establish a definitive version of the text, which he locates in the "final" typescript of "The Searchlight", Jane de Gay perceives the Freshwater drafts as texts subsequent to, and independent of, the published version of the story and not as "inadequate" earlier variants of it. The differences between these two positions have a broader critical significance, which bears some relation to the shift in recent decades from "textual criticism", the purpose of which is to produce an authoritative text, to "genetic criticism", which, in the words of one critic, "uses preparatory material, variant textual states or any other evidence of the compositional process for purposes of interpretation and evaluation" (Falconer 1993: 71). Yet while Jane de Gay queries Graham's location of the authoritative text, she still seeks to establish an autonomous Freshwater version of "the telescope story".

5 My interest, like that of de Gay, lies substantially in the "Freshwater" versions of the narrative, but these seem to me not altogether distinct from the version published as "The Searchlight". The interplay of all the textual variants, from 1929 through to 1941, opens up significant issues of creation and composition, and of the "scene-making" at the heart of Woolf's writing. Questions of autobiography and life-writing are raised in and by construction of "the telescope story" which relate to genesis and literary genetics in a number of senses and in a number of ways, including structure and theme. They turn on what has brought not only writing but the very self into being. They also bring to the fore the question of "framing" in Woolf's short fiction, and the question of the "frame" becomes inseparable from issues and problems of narrative motivation – that is, the issue of how to construct a narrative rationale as well as a casing for a "scene".

6 At the heart of all Woolf's versions of her telescope story is a passage from the nineteenth-century writer and Colonial Office official Sir Henry Taylor's autobiography, published in two volumes in 1877 (privately printed) and then in 1885. In the autobiography, Taylor described his early years, recalling how he had lived for a time in "an old square ivy-covered border tower" in the North of England, always isolated from other people but particularly so one summer when his father and stepmother were away. He wrote:

> All the day long I saw no one but the servants, except that I sometimes looked through a telescope ... at the goings on of a farmstead on a road which skirted our grounds at the farther end. Through this telescope I once saw a young daughter of the farmer rush into the arms of her brother, on his return after an absence, radiant with joy. I think this was the only phenomenon of human emotion which I had witnessed for three years .... (Taylor 1885: Vol. 1, 45.)

7 He then returns, in Graham's words, to "the leisurely chronicle of his Victorian life" (Graham 1976: 383).

8 In Woolf's retellings of this episode, the embrace seen through the telescope is not that between siblings but between lovers, and the young man (not always identified in the various drafts as Henry Taylor) is impelled, when he sees the embrace, the kiss, in his lens, to run out of his tower and towards, or into, his life. She also revises the scene so that the telescope is focused on the sky before it is turned to the earth. The young man thus becomes an amateur astronomer, opening up a link between her story and Thomas Hardy's novel of 1882, *Two on a Tower*, in which the youthful hero, all of whose passions are for the stars and the sky, enters into a relationship, and subsequently a clandestine marriage, with the woman on whose estate the tower with its telescope sits. In his 1895 Preface to the novel Hardy wrote: "This slightly built romance was the outcome of a wish to set the emotional history of two infinitesimal lives against the stupendous background of the stellar universe, and to impart to readers the sentiment that of these contrasting magnitudes the smaller might be the greater to them as men" (Hardy v.). A recent critic has argued of *Two on a Tower*: "Although new configurations of time and space had the potential to dwarf psychologically the human imagination, Hardy's cosmological narratives effectively divulge ... ways in which readers may productively scrutinise their own life stories as well as the cultural evolution of the species" (Radford 2007). The echoes of Hardy's novel in Woolf's 'telescope story' are connected to her own fascination with relations of distance and proximity and between human experience and the dimensions of time and space. The centrality of Victorian science and scientific knowledge to Hardy's novel, one of whose strands is the crucial link between astronomy and photography, is also one of the numerous sub-texts and inter-texts of Woolf's story.

9 The published version of the story, "The Searchlight", is not connected to Freshwater, and Sir Henry Taylor is absent from the scene. A Mrs Ivimey, a society-lady, stands on the balcony of a London club before going with her party to the theatre. The search-lights of the war-years illuminate the scene, the story thus opening up the concepts, also at the heart of *Between the Acts*, of the theatre of war and of the "interval" between acts and events. The beam of light the searchlights cast motivates Mrs Ivimey to tell the story of her great-grand-father, who when a boy, lived in an isolated tower, and one day turned his telescope from the skies to the earth. She enacts, with her fingers, the focusing of the telescope – "She made another quick little movement as if she were twirling something": "He focussed it", she said, "He focussed it upon the earth. He focussed it upon a dark mass of wood upon the horizon. He focussed it so that he could see ... each tree... each tree separate ... and the birds ... rising and falling ..." (Woolf 1991: 271). As Holly Henry notes, in her recent study *Virginia Woolf and the Discourse of Science: The Aesthetics of Astronomy*, the elliptical interruptions mean that the reader "must physically pause as the sentence is focused through the mechanisms of the ellipses and repetition of the words 'focussed', 'each' and 'lower'", while Mrs Ivimey, "who narrates her tale while miming the act of peering through an imaginary telescope, looks back in time to glimpse a crucial moment which marks the beginning of her life", her great-grandfather having married the young woman spied through the telescope (Henry 54-5). The telescope is thus understood as a device that allows for a simultaneous co-existence of the past and present. The young woman is Mrs Ivimey's great-grandmother, and it is thus her own origin or genesis – "metaphorically, a primal scene", as Julia Briggs notes - that Mrs Ivimey "sees" (Briggs 52).

10 Holly Henry has made the published version of the story a central plank in her study, connecting it to Woolf's fascination with telescopic vision, astronomy and the popularization of science in the early twentieth-century, and to the links between "telescopes, searchlights and war" (Henry 52). For Henry, the interest of "The Searchlight" is the question of telescopic vision, which, she argues, shaped Woolf's "narrative scoping strategies" (Henry 51). I want to extend this focus in order to explore both what Woolf may have wanted from "the scene" and the issue of memory. The story, in its various manifestations, was bound into the two periods in Woolf's life – the mid-late 1920s and the mid-late 1930s – when, in her writing, she was considering the question of memory, her childhood and her mother's life most intensely.[1]

11 The earliest draft of the "telescope story", titled "What the Telescope Discovered", was written in 1929.[2] It has no framing narrative and does not name the young man in his tower as Henry Taylor. It describes a boy in his tower on a lovely evening in which there is complete stillness in the air, but a "mysterious throbbing outside". He turns his telescope from moon to earth and gradually brings a nearby farm "more and more clearly into view ... He gazed and gazed as if he were exploring a new world". He sees a servant girl coming out of a door, and a farm boy seizing her "in his arms". "He could see every movement – he could see the boys face flush and the girl half struggle from him and then give himself up to his embrace. He kept his telescope turned on them through the telescope. He kept it motionless fixed motionless upon them". Then he rushes out of the tower "not knowing where he went or where he looked to find. Through the telescope he had discovered a new world".

12 A 1930 version – "Incongruous/Inaccurate Memories" – identifies the story as that of Sir Henry Taylor.[3] The opening frame here (as in the draft called "Ghosts") suggests that "scenes" in narrative can transcend their immediate contexts: "these expansions and transformations are not travesties, but that the changes and rearrangements are only the [...] unfurling of a scene which when dropped into sympathetic waters. It is the natural effect of words when they are for some reason highly charged with meaning so as to go on living". Even in the works of lesser writers this effect can occur, 'especially in autobiography':

> On they plod with their narrative and nothing happens, on they go, on we stumble, one thing follows another; then for no reason they present us with a scene, all of a sudden, and the scene begins to swell and to move and to float and to expand and is never afterwards to be forgotten, though by knocking about it has mixed itself up with so much else that one would be sorry ever again to compare it with the original.

13 The narrator then continues to tell – from "memory" – the telescope story. The telescope, turned upon the earth, picks up hills, clouds, sheep, the leaves of trees, a church steeple, an old farm house, windows, and "suddenly the disc of light fell upon two faces – a man and a woman, within that ring of perfect clearness, they we held fast ... they kissed ... There was life, there was love, there was passion. Sweeping the telescope aside, Henry crammed his hat on his head, rushed down stairs out onto the road, out into the world – and so became in time – was it Sir Henry Taylor of the Colonial Office?".

14 In her framing of the telescope scene, Woolf was, it would seem, puzzling over the impact that the brief passage in Henry's Taylor autobiography had had on her, and makes it stand for other "scenes" which imprint themselves upon the reader's mind. She implies that the dull Victorian autobiography, like History, gives us "one damn thing after

another". But then we are brought to a halt by "a scene" that is so resonant that it becomes a permanent dimension of the reader's experience. The autobiographer transcribes it, however, "for no reason", Woolf suggests, as if the scene's very lack of narrative and subjective motivation, the unthinking quality of its presentation, were part of the condition for its transmission to another's subjectivity.

15 Woolf's phrase the "unfurling of the scene" recalls Lily Briscoe's thoughts about Mr and Mrs Ramsay – "She was not inventing; she was only trying to smooth out something she had been given years ago folded up; something she had seen" (Woolf 1992: 215). The liquid imagery – "the scene begins to swell and to move and to float and to expand" –also echoes the most memorable scene of memory and scene-making in modern literature; Proust's recalling of his past in the cup of tea, and his analogising of the act of memory in the unfurling and expansion of the little Japanese pieces of paper which become "flowers or houses or people" (Proust 55). Proust's analogy is also an allegory, as John Coyle suggests, "of the transmutation of imaginative insight into fictional creation, and of the movement from solipsism to a populated world" (Coyle, 2006). Both the transmutation and the movement are echoed in Woolf's relationship to, and reconstruction of, "the telescope story", as she turns the borrowed scene into fictional forms and represents the ways in which solipsism – that of the boy alone in his tower – is transformed into relationship through the focus on the world outside and his perceiving of life, love and passion. The sexual dimensions of Woolf's scene-making – the "humming" and the "mysterious throbbing" – are inextricably linked to the question of creativity and literary genesis: they are also to be found in her account (written in a letter to Roger Fry) of reading Proust in 1922, in which she described the extraordinary ways in which *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu* "titillates my own desire for expression [...] such is the astonishing vibration and saturation and intensification that he procures – theres something sexual in it – that I feel I *can* write like that, and seize my pen and then I *can't* write like that. Scarcely anyone so stimulates the nerves of language in me: it becomes an obsession" (Woolf 1976: 525).

16 Woolf used the Proustian image in *Jacob's Room*, when she described the fashion for putting "little paper flowers" in finger-bowls; in the telescope story draft it seems to raise, however, more complex and unresolved questions of memory and of what it might mean to take on as one's own another person's memory. The scene becomes, in the liquid imagery of the story's opening, a "floating incident" of the kind Woolf was to describe in her own autobiography *Sketch of the Past*, in which she also wrote of the ways in which the "moments of being" she recalls always included "a circle of the scene which they cut out: and all surrounded by a vast space – that is a rough visual description of childhood. This is how I shape it" (Woolf 2002: 91).[4] Memory and scene-making are thus shaped in the form of the telescopic or photographic optic – "in the circle of the lens" – as well as through the image of the self as "a porous vessel afloat on sensation".

17 The drafts of the telescope story appear to be connected to Woolf's self-representations and to the question of scene-making, her natural way, she writes, in "Sketch of the Past", of "marking the past":

> A scene always comes to the top; arranged, representative. This confirms me in my instinctive notion – it is irrational, it will not stand argument, that we are sealed vessels afloat upon what it is convenient to call reality; at some moments, without a reason, without an effort, the sealing matter cracks; in floods reality; that is a scene – for they would not survive entire so many ruinous years unless they were made of something permanent; that is a proof of their "reality". (Woolf 2002: 145)

18 The telescope scene survives entire, but, as Woolf suggests in her drafts, it "mixes itself up with so much else". What are the components of this mixing? Increasingly, Woolf began to write the scene into Freshwater, where her great-aunt Julia Margaret Cameron lived and took photographs of "famous men and fair women". Henry Taylor was her guest and one of her photographic subjects, and certainly one of the bearded sages to whom Roger Fry alluded in the edition of the photographs he prefaced and edited with Woolf: "In that protected garden of culture women grew to strange beauty, and the men – how lush and rank are their growths. How they abound in the sense of their own personalities" (Fry 1973: 24-5). The actress Ellen Terry – married at the age of 16 to the painter G.F. Watts and photographed at this time by Cameron, most famously in an image entitled "Sadness" – entered Woolf's narrative frame. In the draft titled "A Scene from the Past" (with its marked echoes of "Sketch of the Past") the motivation for the narration of the telescope scene (for which Woolf was always searching) became Terry's confession to Sir Henry Taylor, with whom she is walking on Freshwater Down, of an illicit kiss in the garden the previous evening – "He kissed me" - while the rooks call over Farringford Woods "Maud, Maud, Maud". This leads Henry Taylor to tell Terry the telescope story, of himself as a young man in his tower seeing "A man kissing a woman". The narrative now revolves around two scenes of kissing.[5]

19 Henry Taylor recovers the past within a narrative whose own distance from the past of its narration is insisted upon throughout: "The scene was Freshwater; the date 1860; the month June ... Everything there was different from what it is today.[6] From the "platform" (the term Woolf used in "Sketch of the Past") of 1860, we are returned to Henry Taylor's boyhood. As he "brought before her the stamp of a horse in the stables; the clink of a bucket on the stones; moss on ruined sheds, and himself, a boy", Ellen Terry "saw what he saw". Memories can be transferred, in and through the mind's eye, and their transmission, within the frame of the story, from Henry Taylor to Ellen Terry, models that of their transmission from writer to reader, exemplified in the transference of the original scene from Taylor's autobiography to Woolf.

20 In "A Scene from the Past", Henry Taylor reproduces mimetically the gestures of that lost time as he narrates the scene from the past:

> One June day, he said, he mounted to his tower alone. And seizing the telescope – it was her arm he seized – he turned it – so –down onto the earth.
> Here he cast his eyes down on to the earth. Her's [sic] followed his. And she saw what he saw. Not turf, not daisies, but moors flowing and great trees. Rooks were rising and falling, and in the clearing of a wood she saw an old gabled house. And then – what then?
> He was silent. The climb to the top of the down was steep. Pressing her dove grey glove upon his arm she urged him: 'Tell me, tell me – what did you seen then?'
> He drew himself erect. His eyes flashed. And in a voice of thunder that drowned the cawing of the rooks he shouted: "A man kissing a woman". [7]

21 As in a film, one landscape, or backdrop, is replaced by another, a trope used by Woolf in *The Years*.[8] Woolf's narrative is also cinematographic in its representation of the close-up kiss, a central image and narrative device in film from the 1890s onwards, and the topic of numerous critiques, as the final kiss or "clinch" became a standard way in which to close a scene or an entire film. The 1929 version of Woolf's story, "What the Telescope Discovered", has, moreover, marked echoes of the titles of early films which, employing subjective point-of-view shots, often pointed up the "voyeuristic" dimensions of their perspectives: G.A. Smith's "As Seen Through a Telescope", in which a middle-aged man

focuses his telescope on the ankle of a young woman bicyclist, which the spectator also views in the circle of his lens, was an influential model in the new medium. Its title would seem to be echoed by Woolf, who also hints at the voyeurism and the sexual dimensions of the scene she recreates, in her account of the "mysterious throbbing" which leads the young Henry Taylor to turn his telescope from sky to earth, and the flush on the face of the boy whom he sees through his lens. In the 1930 version, "Inaccurate Memories", the framing of the embracing couple is markedly filmic. As the boy focuses and lowers the telescope:

> He could count the tiles, see the blue green pigeons waddling along the gutters, then the windows with their blinds blowing from the edge, and still lowering, it, suddenly the disc of light fell upon two faces, a mans and a womans; within that ring of perfect clearness they were held fast. An extraordinary expression was on their faces; they closed together; they kissed. It was miles away; but the shock was like a blow on his own shoulder. There was life, there was life, there was passion.

22 Woolf seems, in certain drafts of the story, to be drawing attention to the cliché of the "clinch". The ironic distance she adopts is also at one with the suggestion that there is a very "Victorian" bathos to "the scene": "I never knew a mother's love", she has Sir Henry Taylor pronounce in one version of the narrative.[9] Woolf's choices of an appropriate mode in which to tell the tale, and of the degree of irony to adopt, often seem uncertain and unstable: this undoubtedly contributed to her multiple writings and rewritings.

23 There would appear to be, however, more than an ironic intention at work in the proto-cinematographic focus on "the kiss" as seen through the telescope and its exploration of its impact on the viewing subject. Suggestive connections emerge between Woolf's narrative and Walter Benjamin's project, described in a letter to his friend Werner Kraft in 1935, of "pointing my telescope through the bloody mist at a mirage of the nineteenth century that I am attempting to reproduce based on the characteristics it will manifest in a future state of the world, liberated from magic" (Benjamin: 1994). As Jan Holmberg suggests, Benjamin's use of the trope of the telescope to overcome the distance between his own time and the nineteenth century expresses the "ambiguous tension between distance and proximity", as a specifically modern experience, articulated most fully in his essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (Holmberg 2000: 85). Holmberg suggests that this tension is "aptly captured by the seemingly paradoxical concept of de-distancing" (Holmberg 2000: 84) (Martin Heidegger's *Ent-fernung*), understood as "the distanciation of distance", or, in Jacques Derrida's phrase, as a "remote proximity" (Derrida 1979: 50-51), and represented in cinema in the "figure of closing in", in instances in which "gaining knowledge is correlated with closing in" and in the use of extreme close-ups. In early cinema, the frequent use of telescopes "seems to underscore dimension of near and far" while, more generally, camera motion was described by early commentators as an interplay between emotional, spatial and temporal distance and proximity. As the film critic Eric Elliott wrote in 1928:

> Size may alter even as we watch the scene, that is, by *camera locomotion*. We, as spectators, draw near to a subject, may become intimate with a distant object or emotion; conversely, we may depart from the object or emotion, become more and more separated from it, until (if necessary) it becomes absolutely final and past. (Elliott 1928: 67)

24 The "near and far" with which Woolf is concerned, and the interplay between distance and proximity, are profoundly linked to her relationship with the Victorian past and, as I have suggested, to the question of her own "genesis". In this sense, the "telescope story"

takes its place alongside *To the Lighthouse*, a text in which optical technologies – telescope, photograph, film – become the media of memory and of the "passage" between present and past, past and present. Woolf's mother and father can also be glimpsed in the circle of the lens of the "telescope story". In biographical terms they both had family or professional connections to Henry Taylor, and Leslie Stephen wrote Taylor's *Dictionary of National Biography* entry, making no mention of the scene in the tower, and detailing his literary career and his career in the Colonial Office. The *DNB* indeed figures in a number of the story's drafts, as a text which "remains intact" during the war's destruction, while "the book in which this story [the telescope story] is told, and the album in which you could see him [Henry Taylor] draped in a shawl posed as King Arthur were destroyed only the other day by enemy action".[10]

25 In some versions of the story Woolf suggests that she is narrating what Leslie Stephen (in the 'person' of the *DNB*) excluded, though she represents the depredations of war taking their revenge, leaving only the official account. There is a strongly gendered dimension to these questions of historical writing: what it selects and omits, what is preserved and what lost or destroyed. Woolf's concern with gendered inscriptions and reinscriptions can also be seen in the ways in which she renders the telescope scene itself as a reworking of Tennyson's "The Lady of Shallot". In Woolf's versions, there is a man, not a woman, in a tower; the mirror has become a telescope; and looking, with desire, at the world outside and at human forms, is an invitation to life, and not to death. But, Woolf suggests, Henry Taylor ran towards the Colonial Office, and away from the scene, or the moment, or the perception, that might have marked him out for a different life-course. This is perhaps why Woolf wanted the scene for herself and why she keeps on retelling and remaking it. She did not so much steal the scene, it could be said, as rescue it.

26 Woolf's play *Freshwater*, written in 1923 and then fully revised in 1935, when it was performed by members of the Bloomsbury group, was also intertwined with the history of the "telescope story's" composition. The play was to be "a skit upon our great aunts", as she wrote to Desmond MacCarthy: "The idea is to have masses of Cameron photographs, shawls, cameos, peg-top trousers, laurel trees, laureates and all the rest" (Woolf 1977: 72-3). Julia Margaret Cameron was played by Vanessa Bell, a question of how we "become" our ancestors that absorbed Woolf, and which lies at the heart of *Orlando*. The figure of Ellen Terry became, however, as or more prominent than that of Cameron in both versions of the play, many of whose components overlap with the various drafts of the telescope story, though Henry Taylor is not a presence in *Freshwater*. There are many reasons why the figure of Ellen Terry should have fascinated Woolf, but one of them was clearly that her life, for a short time, was so intertwined with that of Woolf's "great aunts". They offered patronage to Watts, and strongly encouraged his marriage to Ellen Terry, who was thirty years younger than Watts: a marriage which she claimed in her memoir 'delighted' her parents as much as it did her young self: "I was happy, because my face was the type which the great artist who married me loved to paint" (Terry 1908: 53). A year later, there was a complete separation, 'which was arranged for me in much the same way as my marriage as had been" (Terry 1908: 59). Woolf's great-aunts and uncles were clearly instrumental in arranging both the marriage and the separation, playing a shaping, and, it could be argued, shameful part in her story.

27 *Freshwater*, for all its farce and facetiousness, makes a serious point in representing Terry as a victim of Victorian idealisations of female beauty and passivity, and in this Julia Margaret Cameron is seen to be as complicit as the male poets and painters, Tennyson

and Watts, as she dresses Terry in a turkey's wings to pose for the figure of the Muse. "I longed to arrest all beauty that came before me, and at length the longing has been satisfied", Cameron wrote of her photographic art (Woolf 1992: 18). Recent critics and photographic historians have pointed to the radical nature of many of her images and techniques, including and especially her diminishing of precise and definite focus. Woolf, however, in *Freshwater* in particular, represented Cameron's art, and her obsession with "beauty", as a very Victorian "arrest", in the sense of making static, of the energy and movement that characterised the young Ellen Terry and, as Woolf would later present it, of her own mutable, changeable, "sketch"-like art of theatre: "Every night when the curtain goes down the beautiful coloured canvas is rubbed out" (Woolf 1967: 67).

28 In the play, Terry escapes from Freshwater, and its group of Victorian aesthetes and eccentrics, eloping with a young man who has no artistic pretensions, and heading for a Bloomsbury address which had indeed been the Stephens' own home. Through a contraction of time which also characterizes the shift from the Victorian to the post-war in *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf, in her comic play, thus had Terry enact a version of the Stephens's children own "escape" from Victorian Kensington to the more Bohemian Bloomsbury when their father died in 1904.

29 Woolf's fascination with the figure of Terry culminated in a late essay on the actress in which she drew upon Terry's memoirs, *The Story of My life* (first published in 1908 and revised in 1932), the correspondence between Terry and George Bernard Shaw, published posthumously in 1931, as well as the theatre director Edward Gordon Craig's account of his mother, *Ellen Terry and her Secret Self*. Woolf's essay was written in the Autumn of 1940 and published in February 1941: its composition overlapped with that of *Between the Acts*, in which Terry's daughter Edith Craig and the Barn Theatre undoubtedly provided models for Miss La Trobe and her staging of the village pageant. A draft page of *Between the Acts* (part of the eighteenth-century act of the village pageant) is backed by a quotation from Terry's memoir and part of a passage from a letter to Shaw, both quotations describing the circumstances of Terry's brief marriage to G.F. Watts. In her memoir, Terry wrote of the period in which she became indifferent to her acting: "I was just dreaming of and aspiring after another world, a world full of pictures and music and gentle, artistic people with quiet voices and elegant manners. The reality of such a world was Little Holland House, the home of Mr Watts" (Terry 1908: 48). To Shaw, Terry had written, in a letter dated 7 November 1896 (only part of which is reproduced in the collection edited by Christopher St John), of the significance of "kissing" and of "my first kiss": "I made myself such a donkey over it, and always laugh now when I remember" (St. John 1949: 111). Woolf begins the transcription of the passage from the sentence that followed, omitting the bracketed portion:

> Mr Watts kissed me in the studio one day, but sweetly and gently [all tenderness and kindness, and then I was what was call 'engaged' to him and all the rest of it, and my people hated it,] and I was in Heaven, for I knew I was to live with those pictures. "Always," I thought, and to sit to that gentle Mr W. and clean his brushes, and play my idiotic piano to him, and sit with him there in wonderland (the Studio). [11]

30 As in the Henry Taylor "telescope" scene, "the kiss", which condenses and emblematises Victorian sexuality, changes the course of a life.

31 Woolf drew directly on Terry's words in her published essay on the actress, in which she played on the concept of the "sketch" as something both written and drawn: in her letters and memoirs, she suggested, Terry

> dashed off a sketch for a portrait – here a nose, here an arm, here a foot, and there a mere scribble in the margin. The sketches done in different moods, in different angles, sometimes contradict each other. The nose cannot belong to the eyes; the arm is out of all proportion to the foot. It is difficult to assemble them. And there are blank pages too. (Woolf 1967: 68)

32 Picking up on Edward Gordon Craig's account of his mother's "secret self", Woolf's essay pointed to Terry's multiple selves which are schematised by "the two Ellen Terry's – Ellen the mother, and Ellen the actress". She also used Terry's account of looking at a "very beautiful" old kitchen chair in her letter to Shaw, "rush-bottomed, sturdy-legged and wavy-backed", to emblematise the ways in which the world of the stage could be readily displaced by Terry's intense, painterly perception of reality (Woolf 1967: 71). Perhaps, Woolf implies, Terry could have been a painter rather than a painter's Muse.

33 Ellen Terry's life for a time touched closely upon that of Woolf's mother, despite the radical differences in their class and background. Born within a year of each other, Ellen Terry and Julia Jackson were both beautiful young women who, in the early 1860s, were "presented" at Little Holland House (where artists and writers met at the home of Woolf's great-aunt and uncle Prinsep) and photographed by Julia Margaret Cameron. Woolf wrote in "Sketch of the Past":

> How easy it is to fill in the picture with set pieces that I have gathered from memoirs – to bring in Tennyson in his wideawake; Watts in his smock frock; Ellen Terry dressed as a boy; Garibaldi in his red shirt – and Henry Taylor turned from him to my mother – "the face of one fair girl was more to me" – so he says in a poem. But if I turn to my mother, how difficult it is to single her out as she really was'. (Woolf 2002: 98)

34 Woolf's fascination with Terry's mercurial qualities, and her "secret self", begins to bear on what she saw as her mother's two lives, evidenced in her two very different marriages; the first to Herbert Duckworth and the second, after his shockingly sudden death in the first years of the marriage, to the widowed Leslie Stephen. The attenuation of the relationship between the half-siblings, the Stephen and the Duckworth children, after Leslie Stephen's death would seem to confirm the absoluteness of the difference between the two men and the two marriages and, by extension, Julia Stephen's "two selves".

35 The central connection between "the telescope story" in all its variants and those writings of Woolf with which it intersected in the space and time of composition – *To the Lighthouse, Freshwater,* "Ellen Terry", "A Sketch of the Past", *Between the Acts,* is the question of origins. We might imagine a version of the story in which a child looks through the telescope at the figures of the parents – "a man's head, a woman's head"– as in Rachel's view from the ground, in *The Voyage Out*, as she sees the figures of Terence and Helen kissing above her. We might also be reminded of the photograph taken at St Ives, in which we see Virginia as a child, in the corner of the room, looking at her parents reading on the sofa, as well as the haunting image of the mother in *To the Lighthouse*:

> faint and flickering, like a yellow beam or the circle at the end of the telescope, a lady in a grey cloak, stooping over her flowers, went wandering over the bedroom wall, up the dressing-table, across the wash-stand, as Mrs McNab hobbled and ambled, dusting, straightening. (Woolf 1992: 149)

36 Such images are, as I have suggested, framed in and by the relation between distance and proximity (including and especially the relationship between modernity and the Victorian past) which lies at the heart of so much of Woolf's writing, and is so often viewed through the lenses of the technologies of vision.

37 The published version of the story – "The Searchlight" – occludes, through a fiction-making marked by the theatricality of its performance, the markers of the story's own genesis. Sir Henry Taylor and Woolf's own "Victorian" family are absorbed into Mrs Ivimey and her drama of her origins. Vanessa Bell commented on the curious name Woolf had chosen for the protagonist of the story, at the same time noting that she felt very drawn to illustrate it, but perplexed as to the choice of visual image she might make for so multifarious a narrative. It could be suggested, however, that Woolf was able to complete "The Searchlight" precisely because, in contrast to the other variants of "the telescope story", it possessed the self-containment of the overtly fictional artefact and had not (in the words Woolf used to describe the processes by which a "scene" is transmitted and incorporated) "mixe[d] itself up with so much else". The variants of the "telescope story", provisional and sketchy as many of them are, provide windows onto the components of this "mixing" and onto the ways in which the "telescope scene" came to function as a "primal scene" or "ur-scene". It allowed Woolf to explore the genesis of "scene-making" – the basis of her art and writing – as intertwined, in complex and overdetermined ways, with the issue of her own cultural and biological origins and "making".

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NOTES

1. The significant works in these contexts include, from the mid-late 1920s, "The Cinema" (1926), *To the Lighthouse* (1927), Woolf's introduction to the Hogarth Press edition of Julia Margaret Cameron photographs, *Victorian Photographs of Famous Men and Fair Women* (1926), the first version of *Freshwater* (1923), the first version of "The Searchlight" (1929) and *A Room of One's Own* (1929). Works from the mid-late 1930s include the second version of *Freshwater* (1935), *Between the Acts* (1941), "Ellen Terry" (1940), later draft versions of "the telescope story" and "A Sketch of the Past" (1939).

2. "What the Telescope Discovered". Ts. MH/B9j 1-5. Monk's House Papers, University of Sussex, England.

3. "Inaccurate/Incongruous Memories". Ts. MH/B9k: 1-5. Monk's House Papers, University of Sussex, England.

4. Woolf used the image of the circle in her essay "A Glance at Turgenev" (1921) as, in Nina Skrbic's words, "a supreme symbol of wholeness and unity, a wholeness and unity constantly threatened by the chaos outside it" (Nena Skrbic, "Crossing Cultural Boundaries", in (Benzel and Hoberman 33). In the essay Woolf wrote of Turgenev's "Russian" melancholy: "Beyond the circle of his scene seems to lie a great space, which flows in at the window, presses upon people, isolates them, makes them incapable of action, indifferent to effect, sincere, and open-minded. Some background of that sort is common to much of Russian literature" (Woolf 1988: 316).

5. Woolf wrote the draft entitled "A Scene from the Past", or "Scene from the Past", in at least five versions. The longest version, from which these quotes are taken is "A Scene from the Past". Ts. MH/B10e: 1-25. Monk's House Papers, University of Sussex, England.

6. Woolf, "A Scene from the Past". Ts. MH/B10e: 1. Monk's House Papers. University of Sussex, England.

7. Woolf, "A Scene from the Past". Ts. MH/B10e: 1. Monk's House Papers. University of Sussex, England

8. In the final part of *The Years*, "Present Day", Woolf has North, at the family party, "looking at a couple at the farther end of the room. Both were young; both were silent; they seemed held still in that position by some powerful emotion. As he looked at them, some emotion about himself, about his own life, came over him, and he arranged another background for them or form himself – not the mantelpiece and the bookcase, but cataracts roaring, clouds racing, and they stood on a cliff above a torrent" (Woolf 1968: 203).

9. "A Scene from the Past". Ts. MH/B10e: 3. Monk's House Papers, University of Sussex, England.

10. "A Scene from the Past". Ts. MH/B10e: 3. Monk's House Papers, University of Sussex, England, 24-5.

11. MH/B5a. Monk's House Papers, University of Sussex, England.

RÉSUMÉS

Cet article examine la genèse et les différentes ré-écritures de l'histoire **"**télescope**"** de Woolf, dont la version publiée, **"**The Searchlight**"**, parut dans le volume posthume A Haunted House and Other Stories. Dans un article publié en 1976, J.W. Graham analyse la version publiée comme

étant la version ultime. Plus récemment Jane de Gay a contré ces conclusions et analysé les brouillons de "Freshwater" comme étant des textes à la fois indépendants de "The Searchlight" et postérieurs à cette nouvelle plutôt que des variantes antérieures "peu satisfaisantes". Cet article montre que tout l'intérêt vient au contraire de l'interaction entre toutes les variantes textuelles de 1929 à 1941. Ces variantes ouvrent sur des problèmes cruciaux de création et de composition ainsi que sur la "création de scènes" qui est au cœur de l'écriture de Woolf. La construction de l'histoire"télescope" pose des problèmes liés à l'autobiographie et à l'écriture de la vie, eux-mêmes liés à la genèse et à la génétique littéraire ainsi qu'à la manière dont se forge non seulement l'écriture mais également le moi. Cet article s'intéresse à la dimension " cinématographique" de la nouvelle et à la manière dont elle s'articule, dans toutes ces variantes, avec le lien qu'établit Woolf entre distance et proximité ou passé et présent, et qui sous-tend une grande partie de ses écrits.

AUTEURS

LAURA MARCUS

Regius Professor of Rhetoric and English Literature at the University of Edinburgh. Her publications include Auto/biographical Discourses: *Criticism, Theory, Practice* (1994), *Virginia Woolf: Writers and their Work* (1997: 2nd edition 2004) and *The Tenth Muse: Writing about Cinema in the Modernist Period* (2007). She is editor of Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams: New Interdisciplinary Essays* (1999), co-editor of the *Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century English Literature* (2005), and author of numerous articles on nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature and culture, including essays on Woolf and feminism and on Woolf and the Hogarth Press.